



Nathaniel Mackey

ongoingness

The precarity of one's life changes things. I couldn't take the endlessly ongoing as given. This realization brought a keener sense of urgency to my writing. I have sought out a state of what I refer to as "all-day music," training my mind to always be on call, should something inspire me to write, and to remain open to any form of inspiration: I like interruptions. I like the writing to be situated within the realm of my ordinary life. I am constantly toggling between everyday activities and the world I have been constructing in my head.

Poesy Café
June 19, 2021
Presenter: Tom Corrado

Why Nathaniel Mackey?

A few weeks ago I stumbled upon a review of a just-released book of poems titled *Double Trio* by Nathaniel Mackey, a poet I had never heard of. *Double Trio* actually consists of three volumes of poetry: *Tej Bet*, *So's Notice*, and *Nerve Church*. It's a HUGE boxed set: 976 pages, \$50! According to one blurb, *Double Trio* is structured in part after the last three musical movements of John Coltrane's *Meditations* - *Love*, *Consequence*, and *Serenity* - and stretches Mackey's explorations and improvisations of free jazz into unprecedented poetic territory.

The review included this quote from Mackey: "I turned sixty-five within a couple of months of beginning to write *Double Trio* and I was within a couple of months

of turning seventy-one when I finished it. . . . It was a period of distress and precarity inside and outside both. During this time, a certain disposition or dispensation came upon me that I would characterize or sum up with the words "all day music." It was a time in which I wanted never not to be thinking between poetry and music, poetry and the daily or the everyday, the everyday and the alter-everyday. Philosophically and technically, the work meant to be always pertaining to the relation of parts to one another and of parts to an evolving whole."

NPR's Ken Chen was quoted in the review as saying "For decades, National Book Award-winner Mackey has devoted himself to creating a long poem that covers ambitious territory - and he begins this installment by recalling how early free jazz musicians re-invented the multi-disc record collection because they needed several albums to record their fertile improvisations; you might say that Double Trio is Mackey's multi-disc box set. Double Trio is a libretto of metaphysical music and probably the most important poetry collection to come out [in 2021]."

Intrigued to say the least I began googling Nathaniel Mackey and unearthed articles, reviews, poems, and a wonderful profile piece in the April 12, 2021 issue of The New Yorker.

I was hooked. Here was a poet who loved jazz working on a massive chunk of poetry!

Bio

Poet, novelist, literary critic, anthologist, editor, dj, and professor Nathaniel Mackey was born in 1947 in Miami, Florida, and raised in Southern California. He earned his BA from Princeton and his PhD from Stanford. He taught and lived in Santa Cruz from 1979 to 2010, served as a Chancellor of the Academy of American Poets from 2001 to 2007, and is currently Reynolds Price professor of English and Creative Writing at Duke University. Mackey lives in Durham, North Carolina with his wife, Pascale Gaitet, Professor Emerita in French Literature at UC Santa Cruz, and their two sons.

Books

Poetry

1978 Four for Trane
1983 Septet for the End of Time
1985 Eroding Witness
1993 School of Udhra
1998 Whatssaid Serif
2006 Splay Anthem
2011 Nod House
2015 Blue Fasa

2021 Double Trio: Tej Bet, So's Notice, Nerve Church

Fiction

1986 Bedouin Hornbook
1993 Djbot Baghoustus's Run
2001 Atet A. D.
2008 Bass Cathedral
2017 Late Arcade

Criticism

1993 Discrepant Engagement: Dissonance, Cross-Culturality, and Experimental Writing
2004 Paracritical Hinge: Essays, Talks, Notes, Interviews

Other

1992 Moment's Notice: Jazz in Poetry and Prose

Awards

1993 Whiting Award
2006 National Book Award for Poetry
2007 Foundation for Contemporary Arts Grants to Artists
2008 African American Literature and Culture Society Stephen Henderson Award
2010 Guggenheim Fellowship
2014 Ruth Lilly Poetry Prize
2015 Bollingen Prize for American Poetry
2016 William B. Hart Residency in Poetry
2017 Rebekah Johnson Bobbitt National Poetry Prize

Mackey's Poetic Voice

Mackey works at the intersection of literature and music in the areas of modern and postmodern literature, creative writing, poetry and poetics. His poetry combines African mythology, African-American musical traditions, and Modernist poetic experimentation, and is strongly influenced by the Black Mountain poets, who believed that poetry should be driven by the human rhythms of breath and utterance. He subscribes to their "open field" approach of remaining receptive to poetry wherever it might be, however it might help one gain "leverage" on present-day life. His several ongoing serial projects explore the relationship of poetry and historical memory, as well as the ritual power of poetry and song.

Mackey's academic work brought the Black Mountain Poets into conversation with Afro-Caribbean writers. Both sets of writers sought to free long-suppressed

histories and languages, trying to reckon with the impossibility of ever representing the past through straightforward language.

Influenced by Charles Olson's question as to what role poetry might play in helping us access, understand, and represent the distant past, Mackey insists that poetry is capacious enough to embrace the combined approach of making it up and plumbing its depths.

Mackey cites poets William Carlos Williams and Amiri Baraka, in addition to jazz musicians John Coltrane and Don Cherry, as early influences in his exploration of how language can be infused and informed by music. In a 2006 interview with Bill Forman for *MetroActive* magazine, Mackey addressed the relationship he seeks between music and his own poetry: "I try to cultivate the music of language, which is not just sounds. It's also meaning and implication. It's also nuance. It's also a kind of angular suggestion."

David Hajdu described Mackey's writing as "not simply writing about jazz, but writing as jazz, characterizing the movement of language as "kinetic and also contemplative, elegiac and mercurial, sometimes volatile." (The New York Times Book Review, 2007)

Duke University's Joseph Donohue suggested that readers just coming to Mackey's poetic work will find themselves in the midst of an unfolding adventure with multiple overlapping lifetimes. "It's a world of voyages, departures, arrivals, encounters, visits to and from the dead, visits to and from paradise. We're wandering like we're in the *Odyssey*, but we're never quite sure who we're with, or where, ultimately, we're going." (Poetry Foundation Interview, 2014)

The language of exegesis is crucial to Mackey's poems. Part of the hopefulness that continually surfaces in his poetry requires that someone can wrest meaning out of the phrase, that suddenly a whole new thing opens up. The exegete is a kind of salvific figure who is constantly showing that meaning is continually revealing itself or opening itself to possibilities. (Donohue, 2014)

Mackey's poetry is like an archive of all that the world forgot, what might have been had humans resisted the desire to enslave and colonize one another. It's also an archive of the world as Mackey has taken it in, from concerts and records to poems and lyrical scraps from old anthropology textbooks to the utterances of his friends and family members. (Hsu, *The New Yorker*, April 12, 2021)

The sense of style and cadence in Mackey's poems seems deeply unified and woven together, . . . these are people talking all the time. They are making jokes. They are needling each other. There is this sense that they know each other well. And that there is this playfulness, but that, also, there is this discursiveness going back and forth. (Donohue, 2014)

As here:

N., a jazz musician in nineteen-seventies and eighties Los Angeles, to someone or something called the Angel of Dust, about the progress of a band he has formed.

For Mackey, a poem is a kind of society, made up of sound, sense, and the look of the poem on the page. It is not a discrete piece of writing. It is not a sealed-off ode. A poem is infinitely tweakable, finetunable, not unlike a piece of free jazz where musicians continue to pull more and more song out of an old piece of music (Think John Coltrane's "My Favorite Things").

Here's Mackey in his own words . . .

/Coltrane's/ moved on, so I gotta follow him.

How different can two things be and still have something in common?

Some poets get that "sigh of recognition" when they perform. I try not to have that happen. Audiences never know when I'm done.

I think serial work not only keeps that sense of getting started alive but probably intensifies it as one goes along. In some ways I feel more like I'm just beginning now than I did 30 years ago, partly because I have a bigger sense of what's in motion, what's moving, what the different strands and strains are.

/My poetry is/ a poetry of process and a poetry of finding your way, a poetry of opening a way, but finding that what you found opens out into more stuff than the initial occurrences of it reported. It's a way of living with what you've written, in some way living through what you've written, but also having an interaction with lived experience, not only of things outside the text but the text itself, the way they talk to one another, inform each other, tweak each other, goose each other.

I consider myself not a terribly visual person. I'm just really not. I don't seek out the visual arts in the way I seek out music.

The ability to get into something that initially is forbidding or intimidating or just doesn't speak to you at all is one that is tested and proven. I tend to stay with things which may, on first or second or third hearing or reading, present me with difficulties that make it seem like it isn't going to go anywhere.

What any experimental art is trying to get you to do is move beyond your preconceptions and your expectations regarding what should be happening, what's going to happen, what kinds of effects it should have, and enter a luminal state in which those things can be re-defined in the way that the particular artist or piece of art is proposing.

... I think figures accrue to and build on feeling, and it's no doubt the case that orphaning speaks of and from an emotional disposition I'm both inclined toward and see applying beyond myself. The orphan is such an archetypal figure, recurrent not only in my work but in world culture, because it tugs at the roots of our sense of belonging and the mix of anxiety and solace that goes with that sense. (The Iowa Review, Winter 2014/2015)

Drift is the tension and play between spirit and matter. Spirit wants to be unbound. It's the tension between spirit and letter as well, the play between spirit and letter, the tangential way of knowing that the expression "you get my drift" gets at, not to mention the turns spirit and letter take toward each other and away from each other. Language, especially poetic language, replicates or is infused with the relationship between spirit and matter, the traffic between spirit and letter, its analogue. (The Iowa Review, Winter 2014/2015)

... to the extent that categories and the way things are defined - the boundaries between things, people, areas of experience, areas of endeavor - to the extent that those categories and definitions are rooted in social and political realities, anything one does that challenges them, that transgresses those boundaries and offers new definitions, is to some extent contributing to social change. (Callaloo, Spring 2000)

I think that the audience for poetry has widened in recent years and maybe it's continuing to widen - I hope so. The whole poetry slam phenomenon has created an interest and widened the audience for poetry in significant ways. There's a lot that needs to be done, obviously. But poetry is one of those things that just won't go away, and people keep rediscovering it. I think every generation has a poetry boom, or gives a boom to poetry, gives itself to poetry. There is also a growing sense that poetry has great variety to it, that there are many ways of going about it. I think with the recognition of that variousness, there's been a growth in the audience. (Publisher's Weekly, November 2006)

... The song does remember the deceased, and it's the song that helps the deceased move on - to ascend, in the words of the poem, to the next life. I wanted to take that and apply it to senses of transition and, hopefully, ascendance within life, moments where one feels one has to move on and move up. I didn't know it would become an ongoing, theoretically endless series. (The Paris Review, Spring 2020)

Listen to Cecil Taylor's music. All that rumbling. You know, that sense of coming up from below, all that thunder. Sounds of wrath. There's a challenge and a dare, a kind of discontent in what Cecil's doing. He's saying, You gotta do better. You gotta listen more closely. You gotta be more focused. That sound announces that we're going to a different place.

You build this place. You're making this place, it takes time to lay it out, stock it, to walk around in it, to get to know it. The farther I step into it, the easier

it's become to find more places within. Doors open, lead to other doors. It's a place I like. I guess it's why I'm staying. . . .

The world, music reminds us, inhabits while extending beyond what meets the eye, resides in but rises above what is apprehensible to the senses.

But every now and then, when the flow's not coming, you gotta get up from your couch or the desk, you gotta go out on the porch, look up at the sky and enjoy the humility of just taking in this obviously superior and more complex creativity. What we do could never match that. Could I ever write a poem as intricate as a pinecone?

Takeaway . . .

For Mackey, a POEM is . . .

- a process of finding your way, of opening a way that opens to many ways
- a work in progress
- ongoing, never finished, never done, infinitely tweakable
- unhampered by the need for closure
- unbound by storyline, stretching out to explore sights and sounds
- a cultivation of the music of language
- ritualistic songmaking
- filled primarily with musicians and even those who aren't still use jazz and improvising musicians as reference points
- a sense of place at the intersection of literature and music filled with people conversing about and arguing over where they are, where they're going, where they've been
- a kind of society made up of sound, sense, and appearance
- an excavation of historical memory
- a search for segues, resonances, juxtapositions
- an aid to acquiring "leverage" on present-day life
- writing as jazz, the music of language that is kinetic, contemplative, elegiac, mercurial, volatile
- meaning and implication, nuance, a kind of angular suggestion
- an unfolding adventure with multiple overlapping lifetimes
- a world of voyages, departures, arrivals, encounters, visits to and from the dead, visits to and from paradise

Selected Poems

Song of the Andoumboulou: 55

—orphic fragment—

Carnival morning they

were Greeks in Brazil,
Africans in Greek
disguise. Said of herself

she
was born in a house in
heaven. He said he was
born in the house next
door... They were in hell
In Brazil they were

lovebait.
To abide by hearing was
what love was... To
love was to hear without
looking. Sound was the

beloved's
mummy cloth... All to say,
said the exegete, love in
hell was a voice, to be spoken
to from behind, not be able
to turn and look... It
wasn't Greece where they

were,
nor was it Benin... Carnival
morning in made-up hell, bodies
bathed in loquat light, would-be
song's all the more would-be
title, "Sound and Cerement,"

voice
wound in bandages
raveling
lapse

.

Up all night, slept well
past noon. Awoke restless
having dreamt she awoke on
Lone Coast, wondering
afterwards what it came

to,
glimpsed interstice,
crevice,

crack... Saw her
dead mother and brother
pull up in a car, her brother
at the wheel not having driven

while alive, newly taught
 death it appeared. A fancy car, by
 than any her mother had had while bigger
 alive, she too better off it
 appeared... A wishful read, "it
 appeared" notwithstanding, the
 exegete impossibly benign. Dreamt a dream
 of dream's end, anxious, unannounced,
 Eronel's nevermore namesake, Monk's
 anagrammatic Lenore... That the
 dead return in luxury cars made us
 weep, pathetic its tin elegance, pitiable,
 sweet read misread,
 would-be
 sweet

Song of the Andoumboulou: 60

The vote came in early. We ignored
 it. No ballot-box auction for us...
 Nub's uninstructed dance's bare
 feet, music we took them for. At a
 loss with only bodies to fend with,
 nonsonant waves kept coming,
 sang without wind, saltless,
 waterless, Nub's inverted
 run, Nub newly vented by horns blown
 elsewhere, bells full of insect
 husks... Nonsonant scruff held
 on to, sheeriness... Nothingness
 it seemed we grabbed at, gathered,
 beginning to be unending it seemed. We
 were beginning to be lured again,
 ready to be hectored, huthered, move
 on, beginning to be uprooted again...

A peppered expanse the country we
 crossed. Space doled out so stingily

we wept, love's numb extremity
 the outskirts of Nuh, name whose
 elision
 we embraced... A tale told many
 times over, known before it reached
 us, known before we knew, un-
 backed alley of soul we wandered
 into,
 shadowbox romance it was called...
 Come of late to creation's outskirts,
 rub's new muse a republic of none, a
 yet-to-be band the band we were...
 We were Andoumboulou, dreamt
 in-
 habitants of "mu," moored but
 immersed, real but made up, so much
 farther flung than we'd have thought...
 They the would-be we lay on a bed
 the size of Outlandish. Lip attesting
 lip, tongue rummaging tongue,
 took
 between finger and thumb the hem
 of her dress, flat bead of sweat, salted
 cloth...
 A hammer hit them each on the head.
 Hammered heads rang and rang without
 end... Called it creation, called it
 their clime, close where there was otherwise
 distance, mute endearment, recondite
 embrace... So much farther, felt even
 so,
 mouth she remembered, home. His to hear
 her tell it, hers were it his to say, whose
 book was of lengthening limbs, hers of
 the
 unquenchable kiss... A tale told over and
 over,
 long since known by heart. Lay belly to
 back, turned belly to belly, each the other's
 dreamt accompanist, music they made in
 their sleep... Frayed hem the interstice,
 time's
 moot rule. Time's moot rule amended,
 echoed
 advance it was
 also called

run its course it would have gone
otherwise, time's ulterior bequest...
This they had a way of imagining,

this

they so wished it to be. Abstract he
at the back of her mind, she at the
back of his, each the other's Nub
constituent, ghost of an alternative

life...

They were we before we were, ancestral,

we

who'd never not be ill at ease. A vocation
for lack he'd have said, she'd have said
longing, a world, were they to speak, be-
tween... What wasn't, we'd have said,

went

away, would come back, first afflicted

church,

what would be... We were caught in a
dream whispering names we'd forget
waking up, caught waking up or in a
dream of waking up, moot sound riffling
our lips. Nub was a name, was

was

a name, a was a name, all moving
on... Names came after us, roused us in
our sleep, the ballot-box opening grinned
and grinned again, gone we'd have been

could

we have run... It wasn't we were stuck,
stood frozen, transfixed, Paralytic Dream #12...
It was waking known otherwise put running
out of reach, nonsonance's waterless waves held
us up, more than we could sense but

sensed

even so, nonsonance's
gaptooth
slur

.

Day late so all the old attunements gave
way, late but soon come even so... A
political trek we'd have said it was
albeit politics kept us at bay, nothing

wasn't

politics we'd say. Wanting our want to
be called otherwise, kept at bay though
we were, day late but all the old stories

echoed

yet again, old but even so soon come... A
mystic march they'd have said it was,
acknowledging politics kept us at
bay, everything was mystical
they'd say. Wanting our want to be

so

named, kept at bay as we were,

what

the matter was wasn't a question, no

ques-

tion what

it was

Nub no longer stood but lay and we
lay with it, earth-sway cradling our
backs. What the matter was rocked
us, a way we had with dirt, awaiting

what

already might have been there... Dust...
Abducted future... Dearth Lake's dry
largesse... Dread Lakes' aliases, alibis,

Death

Lake also there... Where we were rubbed
earth in our faces, a feeling we had
for debris. Nub, no longer standing,
filled the air, an exact powder, fell

as

we ran thru it, earth-sway swaddling

our

feet

Song of the Andoumboulou: 258

All hands were on deck as we docked
in the nerve church, metaphoric boat
of soul metamorphic, boat-shaped back

of

the oud whose belly we rode in, ety-
mologic boat of soul catastrophic, church
whose nave we were in. Church cast-
ing color cast a stain on the world. It bore

the
 bright light we'd been thru, gone round
 and come thru again, metamorphic boat
 of soul metaphoric, of what no one would
 say ...
 Whatever it was was what soul was, of
 which only the asker wanted to know.
 All hands were on deck even so. All had
 gone
 well were it only body nerve church meant,
 well were it only soul it meant, well were
 it not a thread of the two, other than either, a
 thread
 and a third, off to itself. All had gone well
 that way, would've gone well were it the way,
 way that it wasn't, would that it were ... We
 lay
 held in the oud whose belly was black, all
 hands on deck as we docked, bent neck and
 bent knee de rigueur in the nerve church, co-
 nundrum the head it hit. Meat and bone apart
 from
 meat and bone was the nerve church, soul
 unbeknown to itself it also was, a certain some-
 thing not something notwithstanding, asked
 a-
 bout no matter no answer would accrue. All
 hands were on deck proclaiming soul, soul not
 something to be said to be had, soul that was
 a
 boat and that sat in the boat it was, borne
 bekown to itself. All hands were on deck not
 proclaiming soul. The less we boasted the
 bet-
 ter we rode the boat that soul was, the boat that
 sold
 us thought to be that
 boat

.

Some were said to have limbo'd below deck,
 the lute's dark insides a madrigal of sorts, its
 back less back than belly. Some were said to
 have
 bent back while surrounded by singers, bent

back so far their heads were on the floor. The
backs of their heads were on the floor, it was

said,

brushed it, the back of the head a belly di-
gesting damage, no way its way a way ... Some
were said, once on deck, to have jumped, a
shark's teeth or breathlessness the way, no way,

was

theirs, jumped, some said, or were thrown. We
knew all this coming into the nerve church, its
nave encyclopedic, no outrage not written down,

histo-

ry a parable of nerve, who
had it

Huff sat at the wheel of the bus calling it a
boat. We were leaving Low Forest again,
a sea of green he called it, all aboard as he

now

called the bus a train. Eleanoir's blue truck
it might've been, might well have been,
might as well have been, so metamorphic the

dock

whence we embarked ... It was nothing if
not Eleanoir's dream, the ship we were in, lute
of the light-lady of night, Eleanoir's loot, we

sur-

mised. Not since primordial beak met pri-
mordial seed had it so accrued, no mile not
haunted, no matter what move we made. Our

bus

put-putted a-
long

.

A canopy of leaves overhead as we made
our way, the sea of green Huff insisted we
call it, the bus our boat and all of it the nerve

church,

nothing not inflected by the blood-guzzling
lute whose intestines history was. Wagadu
lay within sight even so, it or the Eleven Light
City, Eleanoir sitting behind the driver's seat,

whis-

pering things in Huff's ear ... Eleanoir and
Huff we'd have never thought but there it was,
Huff under Eleanoir's influence, Eleanoir

un-

der his. A boat their bed would be, we
heard him whisper back, his and her wish as
much ours as theirs, that history give way

to

romance, what lit the nerve church. Our bus
bumped along, vestiges of memory afoot, de-
bris the boat of soul grew laden with, the lute

our

boat also was claiming blood ... The school
of oud instructed us, taught with drawn strings,
taut cartilage and sinew also known as nerve
church, our tutorial wherein, we saw, would no

time

soon recess. Eleanoir's face, which had float-
ed many a boat, now floated Huff's it came clear
for us to see, nerve church, whose nave we
docked in, nuptial perhaps, our notional romance

call-

ing history moot, such the way we got by ...
Such the way we got by proved everyday by soul
music, Brother B said. Peaches and Herb had

come

on the box. A metaphoric love boat the meta-
morphic boat of soul turned into now. We were
on our way who knew where, bus, boat, train or

truck,

on our way wherever, soon
come

.

We felt the press of consequence inside the
nerve church, the lute's underbelly the oud,
the madrig's underbelly the panther, the deck's

un-

derbelly the hold, metamorphic soul's under-
belly foreboding. We were far from Low For-
est now, far from Lone Coast, on a train from

Bar-

celona to Lyon. Eleanoir slept lying across the
seat across from Itamar and me, her head on
Huff's lap. Her small feet peeped out beautifully

under the blanket she lay wrapped up in... The
train was a boat or it would take us to a boat,
unclear which, the boat of soul that lay docked in the
nerve church, all hands on deck awaiting us, if not,

from

according to some, none other than us. It was night,
nothing visible outside our windows. The commis-
erative dead gauged our quotient of soul, no one able
to say what it was though we rode it, the riding alone

ac-

clear... The train ran away with us, took us away,
soul riding us it seemed, warm and humid with the
breath and the breathing of bodies, a blind winding

was

a boat finding its way thru the night. There was
no way to know it but by its effects, Itamar was say-
ing, an array of aromas we took to pertain thereto

or

vading our
car

per-

Voices fell from the sky, never not
inflected by the dead on the sea floor,
the dead under leaf, needle and cone in

Low

Forest, the dead and how they came
to be that way everywhere... They spoke
of this as the bus rattled on, the boat

cut

thru water, the truck struggled going
up a mountain, the train cried arkestral,
soul bumped again and again against

what

would not
have it

—*"mu" forty-eighth part*—

"While we're alive," we kept
repeating. Tongues, throats,
roofs of our mouths bone dry,
skeletons we'd someday

be...

Panicky masks we wore for

effect more than effect,
more real than we'd admit...

No longer wanting to know
what soul was, happy to

see

shadow, know touch...
Happy to have sun at our
backs, way led by shadow,
happy to have bodies, block

light...

Afternoon sun lighting leaf,
glint of glass, no matter what,
about to be out of body it

seemed...

Soon to be shadowless we thought,
said we thought, not to be offguard,
caught out. Gray morning we

meant

to be done with, requiem so
sweet we forgot what it lamented,

teeth

turning to sugar, we
grinned

.

Day after day of the dead we were
desperate. Dark what the night
before we saw lit, bones we'd
eventually be... At day's end a

new

tally but there it was, barely

begun,

rock the clock tower let go of,
iridescent headstone, moment's
rebuff... Soul, we saw, said we

saw,

invisible imprint. No one wanted to

know

what soul was... Day after day of
the dead we were deaf, numb to
what the night before we said moved

us,

fey light's coded locale... I fell away,
we momentarily gone, deaf but to

brass's obsequy, low brass's
croon begun. I fell away, not fast,
floated,

momentary mention an accord
with the wind, day after day of the dead
the same as day before day of

the dead... "No surprise," I fell away
muttering, knew no one would
hear,
not even
me

.

We wore capes under which we
were in sweaters out at the elbow.
Arms on the table, we chewed our
spoons...

Mouthing the blues, moaned an
abstract truth, kept eating. The
dead's morning-after buffet
someone said it was. Feast of
the
unfed said someone else... What
were we doing there the exegete
kept asking, adamant, uninvited,
morose...

Elbows in the air like wings, we
kept eating, rolled our eyes,
kept
shoveling it in... Day after day
of the dead we were them. We
ate inexhaustibly, ate what wasn't
there,
dead no longer dying of thirst,
hung over, turned our noses up
to
what
was

It was me, we were it, insensate,
sugared sweat what what we drank
tasted like. Even so, the tips of
our

tongues tasted nothing, we sipped
without wincing... We ate cakes,
ate fingernail soup, a new kind of
gazpacho, no one willing to say
what soul was... Knucklebone
soufflé we ate, we ate gristle, eyes
took from flies flying backward
a kind of caviar, none of us wanting
what soul
was

—*“mu” sixty-first part*—

Gray morning, blue morning, a
feather blown between. Mashed
earth incumbent, gone up from,
more naked if ever to be naked,
brink what it was to be on...
Where next we came stick-figure
people greeted us. Abstract
abstract, also something else. Line,
shape, extension each other
than itself, of number we'd have
said the same... Aspect arrested
us, riveted we stood... Stick-
figure epiphany held us in our
everyone's bones in full view...
morning, blue morning, an unheard
string between. Bad heads' morning
reluctance, ennui's next-day dispatch...
were chill, shiver, exegetic sweat, backed-
up interpreters put upon by sluff, none
of us could say what was what. Pale
admonishment poised upon lack,
to unlike, pale strain recumbent, re-
combinant, rude amniotic straw...
Took leave, leave long since taken,

awoke
 to what would otherwise not have been.
 We contested birth, we wanted to be pre-
 andoumboulouous, done-dead gnostics
 again...
 Sound bubbled up, it kept bubbling, sonic
 residue, sonic remit. A fickle sonance,
 fraught sonance, warning we knew nothing,
 stick-figure entourage otherwise issue-
 less, beginning to be remiss it seemed...
 Erst-
 while ecstasies' lapsed enchantment, trance
 gone none could say since when...
 Ghost
 of what lifted us, ghost what lifted us,
 erstwhile
 enchantment between... Fell back, full-out
 extended. Pilgrim someone called me, I said
 no, then I said yes... Brax was on the box
 was what it was, toned uncertainty Stick-figure
 counsel all air, edge, angle, down from where
 we'd
 been and we were again where the Alone lived,
 adage, had it not been so abstract, it might've
 been... Long day of the abalone-shell sunset...
 Stood
 among redwoods expecting the worst... What
 was of note and what abjured nothing. What
 was
 all, none, one, all the
 same

It was a ghost of a trance. I was a
 guest of the trance. What went on we
 blamed on the ghost... It was the
 ghost of a trance, each of us a
 guest
 of the trance. No two times were the
 same...
 When we hit a wrong note we said
 nothing. When we hit the right note
 we said so what... Tell my horse,
 we were told, fluke solace, horse
 we
 were mounted by... What was done

was done by the ghost, gray morning,
morning, eternity be-
tween

blue

Told my horse we would gather at
Nod House, down drinks at the
no-host bar. Dirt was in the drinks

we

drank, planet sludge. Double-take
told its horse whoa, told it unwhoa,
back and forth and back without
end... Talk spun our heads,

told

our horses ride on. Unresolved
which to insist on, stick with. Could it
whoa unwhoa's ramble unresolved...

Spinning heads made us feel we sat on

swivel

seats... Double-take talked us in,

took

us in

Sat again at the same table, no two
times the same, twinship long since
gone. Leaned back, the back legs of
our chairs broke, Nod House Nub's

new

address... A straining look made our
faces look raw, made our skin flush...
Dreamt each other's dream, donned

each

other's costume, hosted one another,

one

stepped in as
one stepped
out

— *"mu" one hundred eighteenth part* —

Heaved our bags and headed out again. Again
the ground that was to've been there wasn't.
Bits of ripcord crowded the box my head had

come, the sense we were a band was back,
the sense we were a band or in a band... The
rotating gate time turned out to be creaked,

be-

pulled away. Lord Invader's Reform School
Band it was we were in, the Pseudo-Dionysian
Fife Corps, the Muvian Wind Xtet... The sense
we were a band or were in a band had come

we

names' wicked sense we called timbre, num-
bers' crooked sense our bequest. Clasp it tee-
tered near to, abstraction, band was what to

back,

there was... Band was what it was to be there
we shouted, band all we thought it would
be. Band was a chant, that we chanted, what

be

chanted, chant said it all would be alright...
A new band, our new name was the Abandoned
Ones, no surprise. We dwelt in the well-being

we

awaited us, never not sure we'd get there, what
way we were yet to know. I stood pat, a rickety
sixty-six, tapped out a scarecrow jig in waltz
time, big toe blunt inside my shoe... Who was I to

that

rhapsodize I chided myself, who to so mark my-
self, chill teeth suddenly forming reforming,
who to let my heart out so... To be at odds with

so

self resounded, sound's own City the wall I hit
my head against, polis was to be and to be so hit...
We heard clamor, clash, blue consonance, noise's

my-

sibling
sense

low

We pumped our arms as though they were
pistons, elbows in and out. We nicked our
name to Abandon. Abandon was our name

now...

Thus was our music no music. Music too
we left behind. Everything beside the point
that there was no point, everything thus the

point... Thus was being there sibling sense

gone
treble, the balm to be a band the true amen-
ity music was, the fact of having been there

new
to its Buddha-nature, the fact of having been
there
moot

•
To have been there wasn't dasein. No Hei-
degger told my horse. Trussed up to
the side it sat, pressed and preponderant,

SOV-
ereign, self-contained, were it music the
music we sloughed... Slipped accompa-
niment, surrogate cloud, rapt adjournment.
Agitant. Surrogate cue... I kept clear of it,

caught
up at arm's length, all but caught out I came
to see... Thus was our music no music it seemed
I said, music more than music I might've said,

might
as well have said, no matter I mumbled other-
wise under my breath... The Freedmen's Debate
Society our name now was, the Ox Tongue
Speaker Exchange. Fractal scratch. Nominative

ser-
ration. Cutaway run, cutaway arrest... Thus was
our music no music I did say, say's default on
sing such as it was... We called it history even

so,
insisted it, the it crowding the corner of eve-
ryone's eye. None of us were not crept up on,
none not required we sing it, say it. Thus was

our
say not
so

Beginning again for the muleteenth time,
we counted off. It was our muleteenth
breakdown, muleteenth new beginning...

Brass
rubbed off on our lips, reed rubbed off as
well, string steel left on our fingertips, stick
wood

left on our
thumbs